

Practice, Practice, Practice

Pay special attention to the following activity types and software features during your practice sessions.

Polls

Determine at what exact point the poll question needs to be opened. If you are co-facilitating, figure out which one of you will open the poll to solicit participant answers, and when and if the poll results will be shared.

Practice working out the exact timing of your poll question hand-off. For example, when the presenter lands on a particular slide, take 'presenter control' and open up the next poll question behind the scenes. Then turn control back to the presenter. Later in the class, when the poll question is needed, it is already loaded and just needs to be opened by the facilitator for participant responses.

Whiteboards

Practice annotating and typing on the screen, and then erasing it. Look to see if everything shows up exactly as expected, both for you and for the participants. You need to thoroughly test out the Annotation tools to check everything works as you want. It is of course best to check that as a participant so that they can see and do what you expect.

Breakout sessions

Determine how you will assign participants to breakout groups, and exactly when you will release them into their groups. Notice if there will be any lag time between the activity directions and the start of the breakout group. Also determine if any pre-class breakout room preparation needs to be done by the trainer, and, if so, when you will do it.

In addition plan what you will do during the breakout group activity-will you go in and out of the rooms or stay in the main room? If you visit the rooms, you will be a silent observer or speak to the group? Will you communicate with the groups in the midst of the activity or let them work on their own?

When I practice assigning breakout groups, I like to plan ahead of time who will go into which groups. I consciously assign partners and teams to promote networking across departments and locations. I also test out the frequency of communicating the groups during an activity. I don't want them to be interrupted by my intrusions, yet I also don't want them to be lost without direction. During practice, I try to determine the appropriate amount of facilitator involvement in each breakout group activity.

We have used Breakout Rooms many times during the Workshop, so I am sure you realise what a great facility for collaboration and learning they are. However, to facilitate a Breakout Room session is tricky at first and takes a lot of practice. But do not let this restrict your use of the facility. I have found that Breakout Rooms are the

best way to engage your participants – so try to use them often.

Bear in mind though that they do eat up lots of session time so you can quickly fall behind schedule. So plan Breakout Rooms into your sessions allowing enough time for them to be completed. Bear in mind though that you need quite a bit of extra time for discussions following the Breakout Room project.

- Needs practice: Facilitating breakout rooms is not the easiest task, although in the better web conferencing systems (like Webex, Adobe Connect and Collaborate) it is made easier for you, and works very well. In each breakout room, you have your own Chat, and Whiteboard.
- Monitor rooms: Make sure that you pop in to the breakout rooms often and always get everyone back into the main room on time.
- Set time limits: Another important point in facilitating Breakout Rooms is to set a time limit for the exercise. I always let each room know when they have 2 minutes to go so they complete the task on time.

Shared Web Browser

Practise transitioning to the website you wish to view during class. This transition should be as seamless as possible to the participants. For example, have your webpage pre-loaded or saved as a quick link so you can jump right to it without stopping on your browser's default home page.

Also, if you plan to type in any fields or dialog boxes that remember your previous entries, clear out your browsing history and Google searches - otherwise participants may see you all of your past websites and searches. Make it as clean as possible for the participants.

It's always a good idea to clear your browsing history prior to a virtual delivery, just in case.

Practice, practice, practice!

The more you deliver in the virtual classroom more practice you will get and the better your training will be. If you're an occasional virtual trainer, make a deliberate choice to schedule practice time in your calendar before every session. The conscious decision to continually practise your delivery will reduce your anxiety and improve your classes. Even if you practise frequently, remember that this does not take the place of your class set up - this is in addition to it.

Also remember that regardless of how often you deliver the same class it is a good idea to consider each session as a practice dress rehearsal.

Solicit feedback after each session, and make notes about how it can be improved. Feedback is a gift when you are open to it. So use practice time to improve your delivery.

Conducting software demonstrations

For those who will be conducting software demos, you will no doubt be making a lot of use of the Application Sharing Facility to demonstrate/train on software products. Conducting software demonstration training is one of the prime uses of live online training and really cannot be accomplished as well in the face-to-face classroom environment.

So let's spend some time looking at facilitating this aspect.

- Use the actual application: For conducting software demonstrations, it is always best to use the actual application itself rather than putting up a series of static screenshots on the slides. So you will need to get the application running on your desktop before you start your session.
- App Share needs practice: Application sharing in the online classroom is one of its major benefits, but it is not simple to use application share professionally, and you will need a lot of practice before you can feel comfortable using it. Please don't 'wing it'. Practice it!
- Be aware of time lag: You should also be aware of a time lag between what the presenter's computer displays, and the participant's display when using resource hungry facilities like App Share. So when demonstrating applications, keep your eye on your second computer screen, to check that the application is showing in the participant view before you start your demonstration.
- The dreaded Cross-Hatch! When conducting Application Share you must be aware of the Cross-Hatch problem which occurs when you open another window whilst working with the application. If you open another window, it will show on the participants' screen as a cross hatch and is a real distraction for participants.
- Disable background programs: And finally, App Share takes a lot of bandwidth so it is especially vital that everyone does not have any background programs running.

Besides having the ability of demonstrating the live application on your computer for everyone to follow your demo, one of the best ways for participants to learn is by actually trying what you have shown them.

In the online classroom, the Facilitator has the ability to pass control of the application running on the Facilitator's computer over to a participant. In that way the participant can use the application as though it was residing on their own computer.

Imagine the possibilities this brings. Can you think of some ways your organisation could use this?

Finally, an important point if you plan to use Application Share. The only drawback is that when you hand over control to a participant, it is only really engaging one participant – the others are passively watching what you do. So ensure that you pass

the control of the application around to all participants.

Conducting a Web Browse

The facility to share your Web Browser is a really good one for online classes – you can show all of the participants a web site which is synced to yours. There are a couple of things just to be aware of though:

You should have the website up and running before your session so that the transition from your slides to the browser is as seamless as possible. So as long as your web browser is already pre-loaded – or saved as a quick link – you can jump right to it without stopping on your browser's default home page.

Be aware though that if you plan to type in the website link, it may display your browser history – so it is best to clear them before your session.

Using media clips

The facility of being able to transmit video in your sessions is invaluable. However, there are some considerations for you to think about before you go headlong in inserting video clips in your sessions.

- Videos are bandwidth hungry: Videos take up a lot of bandwidth so it is always wise to check thoroughly in your rehearsal. There is nothing worse than watching a choppy video which keeps stopping every couple of seconds. It can definitely hinder learning as opposed to what you want to use it for.
- Check software for types of files it can handle: Most web conferencing software can handle showing multimedia files extremely well. But you may need to check your software to see what file types you can use. Additionally, test it on your second computer to check that it runs smoothly on the participants' computer.
- Embed media clips: Another thing to bear in mind about using multimedia clips is that it is usually best not to embed the media into your PowerPoint slide - it's better to load the file into your web conferencing software interface.

I have found that it is best to stream media from a website rather than embedding it into your slide deck.

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